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Adoption of the report of the Commission on its seventh session

Chapter ___.

Draft Chairman's summary of the high-level segment of the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

(New York, 21–23 April 1999)

A. General

1. The high-level segment of the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development focused on the following subjects:

- Tourism;
- Oceans and seas;
- A plan of action for the small island developing States;
- Changing consumption and production patterns;
- Challenges for the future and other matters.

2. This high-level segment attracted more ministers than any previous Commission meeting and all participated actively in the dialogue. There were also a large number of other representatives from national Governments, United Nations organizations and other international organizations and representatives of major groups who made a substantive contribution. The preparations made by Governments, international organizations and agencies, and especially the major groups, including industry, local authorities, trade unions and non-governmental organizations, helped to bring key issues into clear focus.

3. The seventh session of the Commission marked a departure from procedure in previous years, reflecting the call from the sixth session for a more dynamic and participatory process. This involved setting time limits for national statements in order to preserve roughly half the time available on each theme for interactive dialogue. This approach worked well, with many participants indicating that there was greater value in interactive dialogue than a more sterile process involving lengthy prepared statements. It may be worth trying to move further in the new direction next year by increasing the proportion of time spent on each theme available for dialogue and by requiring prepared interventions to focus on specific issues associated with the themes under discussion.

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B. Tourism

4. Participants focused on the need for the Commission to produce a work programme by the conclusion of its seventh session. Their attention was drawn in particular to the draft decision produced by the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Working Group on Consumption and Production Patterns and on Tourism and a summary of specific suggestions from the tourism dialogue circulated by the Chair. Ministers from developed and developing countries provided useful information on activities, policies and strategies in their countries pertaining to sustainable tourism development.

5. Tourism was recognized as a key rapid growth sector in the world economy with important economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts, particularly in small island developing States and tourist destinations with fragile ecosystems. Tourism had the potential to make an important contribution to poverty alleviation and economic advancement, particularly through integrated plans with the inclusion of local stakeholders in planning and development and where a key objective remained the protection of the cultural and natural assets of the tourist locality. It was acknowledged that different forms of tourism and local conditions needed to be taken into account and that war or civil strife was damaging to tourist industries and the environment.

6. There was also recognition that tourism could have adverse impacts, including drug abuse, child labour, prostitution, overcrowding, pressure on resources, leakage of revenues and challenges to established culture. Coastal area development was a particular concern because of the potential for damage to natural assets, communities' livelihoods and culture. Education; capacity-building efforts; support for small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-enterprises; waste minimization; study of "carrying capacity"; commitment to preserve natural and cultural legacies; and the importance of focusing on groups like women and indigenous communities in relation to tourism were identified as ways to address problems. The international community had a special role through focused financial and technical assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technology, particularly in partnership with developing countries, economies in transition and small island developing States.

7. Participants welcomed the multi-stakeholder dialogue on tourism. It was essential that local stakeholders be involved at all levels in tourism planning. The commitment of industry to be part of the solution to identified problems was welcomed. Local authorities also had a special role, particularly in relation to the identification of best practices and planning. Initiatives such as Agenda 21 for travel and tourism and Local Agenda 21 were identified as being positive tools for promoting sustainable development, with many participants expressing the view that stronger emphasis should be given to action at the local level. Participants also encouraged major groups and other stakeholders in their plan to develop more active partnerships for progress in tourism.

8. Participants placed the highest priority on the production of a work programme at the current session that identified clear responsibilities for action and reporting deadlines for work, wherever possible. They stressed that business and industry efforts to promote sustainable development, including in partnership with other stakeholders, should be supported. They also agreed that there were a number of points in the summary of suggestions from the tourism dialogue that should be included in the Commission's work programme. A number of ministers made specific recommendations on items that they believed should be endorsed or ones that might benefit from some further fine-tuning. There was a general sense that some activities merited Commission endorsement, including minimizing packaging waste associated with the travel and tourism industry; an International Maritime Organization (IMO) study on the effectiveness of marine pollution regulations, including in relation to tourism activities; and an invitation to specific international organizations and agencies to make information available on practical sustainable development techniques and ways to address/monitor the impact of tourism development.

9. Ministers and participants expressed abhorrence at the exploitation of women and children, especially through sex tourism. They called for stronger action to combat this phenomenon, especially on the part of those countries from which the tourists came, and noted the special role for the tourism industry in efforts to stamp it out. Governments were urged to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) agreement to eliminate child sexual exploitation and to rigorously enforce laws that prohibited this.

10. Some participants expressed strong concern about labour practices in relation to the tourism sector and emphasized the importance of ILO work in this connection. Other participants cautioned that there were some differences of view in this area.

C. Oceans and seas

11. Participants focused on the need for the Commission to conclude a decision on oceans and seas and paid special attention to the observations, recommendations and proposals produced at the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Working Group on Oceans and Seas and on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, in which connection they confirmed the four main challenges identified at the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group:

- Conserving, managing and achieving sustainable use of fisheries and other marine living resources;
- Preventing pollution and degradation of the marine environment from land-based activities;
- Better scientific understanding of the oceans and seas and their interaction with the world climate system;
- Better international coordination and cooperation.

12. Participants noted the progress that had been made in reaching agreements relating to the oceans and seas and warned about continuing threats which these had not cured. They therefore urged early ratification of relevant agreements with a view to early entry into force. It was essential that agreements be implemented by States and that efforts be made to build capacity and mobilize the resources necessary for implementation (including possibly by partner conferences). Coordination between the different parts of national administrations — as set out in section A of Chapter 17 of Agenda 21[1] — was also necessary to ensure both that national action was integrated and that international bodies did not receive conflicting directions from their member States.

13. On fisheries and other marine living resources, participants stressed the crucial importance in much of the world of ensuring continuing sustainable supply of food from the oceans and seas (a matter of particular moment for many communities in developing countries) as well as the need to protect marine biological diversity. It was important for the Commission to make clear that these two concerns underpinned the need for effective and integrated fisheries management and the protection of the habitats of fish and other biota. Without them, poverty would be exacerbated and the environment would be degraded. A precautionary and ecosystem-based approach to fisheries was stressed, as was the need to make sustainable utilization of ocean resources a realizable goal.

14. Participants stressed the urgent need for action to eliminate overfishing and wasteful fishing practices. Governments were urged to undertake national assessments of their fish stocks and support the work of regional fisheries organizations in improving required scientific data. The need to take early steps to eliminate overcapacity in many fisheries was emphasized. The recent agreement of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on an International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity in this field was commended, but emphasis was laid on the primary role of regional fisheries organizations in implementing it. Participants also stressed the need for early action to end illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, which posed particular threats to artisanal and subsistence fisheries. Capacity-building and resource mobilization were preconditions for action on IUU in many cases. Participants called on all States to acknowledge their responsibilities to ensure that ships flying their flags complied with international law and asked FAO and IMO to cooperate in work to address IUU problems associated with vessels flying flags of convenience.

15. Participants called for further work by global and regional fisheries organizations to reduce by-catch, both of non-target fish species and of other forms of wildlife, to reduce discards and to safeguard breeding stock. Training and capacity-building were important in this respect. Participants called for the evaluation of the possible negative impact of subsidies and other fiscal and economic incentives that might promote overcapitalization, although some expressed the view that certain subsidies could also assist socio-economic policy goals and contribute to the reduction of excessive fishing.

16. Attention was drawn to the importance of coral reefs, both as indicators of the health of the oceans and seas and as a basis for tourist activities, especially in developing countries. The Commission was urged to support the International Coral Reef Initiative. It was also urged to note the value of the establishment of marine protected areas, in suitable circumstances and along with other appropriate tools, as a means to promote protection of the marine environment and the conservation of marine biological diversity in line with the Jakarta mandate of the Convention on Biological Diversity.[2]

17. Participants expressed concern about the slow rate of progress in many aspects of the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities,[3] while welcoming some recent steps and calling for early action by the relevant international bodies and by Governments. Regional and national partnership meetings aimed at accelerating implementation of the Global Programme of Action received strong support. Adequate treatment of wastes, sewage and industrial effluents was identified as a

serious obstacle to implementation of the Global Programme of Action, particularly for developing countries and economies in transition whose representatives cited a need for financial and technological assistance in their efforts to deal with such wastes. Unsustainable development patterns, including overcrowding, in coastal areas were identified as particular problems.

18. Participants welcomed the decision of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to convene a global conference to address sewage as a major land-based source of pollution affecting human and ecosystem health. Efforts to combat the spread of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) were also welcomed. There was discussion about the possible need for a global framework treaty to implement the Global Programme of Action, but a number of participants questioned the feasibility of formulating and implementing such an agreement. Participants also stressed the importance they attached to UNEP's completing the establishment of the Global Programme of Action coordination office and establishing a clearing-house mechanism to provide decision makers with direct access to scientific and technical expertise, financial assistance and capacity-building.

19. There was considerable emphasis on the need for improved scientific understanding of the marine environment as a fundamental basis for sound decision-making, improved human well-being and prevention of environmental degradation including in coastal areas. Participants observed that interaction between atmospheric and oceanic systems was changing as a result of climate change and could lead to serious socio-economic and environmental impacts, such as El Niño. Concerted international action (including coordinated efforts by the United Nations system) to improve scientific understanding was urgently required to deal with the effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

20. With regard to the ongoing efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) as a source of independent scientific advice on oceans and coastal issues, participants suggested that consideration be given to establishing an international panel on marine pollution, along the lines of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

21. Nearly all participants addressed the issue of international cooperation and coordination, exhibiting a keen interest in improving the way in which ocean issues are managed in intergovernmental forums and by international organizations. They attached priority to the identification of coherent, comprehensive and consistent approaches to sustainable development questions in relation to oceans and seas. They believed that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea[4] provides the overall legal framework for the consideration of oceans and seas. Clearly it was appropriate for intergovernmental deliberations to take place in the General Assembly. However, there was a need to enhance the effectiveness of the Assembly's annual debate on oceans and the law of the sea, including by broadening and deepening the Assembly's consideration of oceans and the law of the sea. The Assembly's consideration of oceans needs to be able to range across all oceans issues, including those in Agenda 21, and to take account of the linkages between them. The process should benefit from a thorough and well-prepared analysis. Methods to improve the review of oceans issues should utilize, to the extent possible, existing institutions and make use of existing resources. The view was widely shared that there was a need for "institutional renewal, not new institutions".

22. Participants emphasized the need to identify present gaps and areas where coordination and cooperation should be enhanced. There was particular need for improvements in the process of inter-agency collaboration utilizing existing mechanisms and resources.

23. Participants noted that the Commission's recommendations on how to improve international coordination and cooperation would be presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session for its further consideration and action. They attached importance to this work and the need to provide clear and detailed guidance to the Assembly.

D. Small island developing States

24. The co-Chair of the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Working Group on Oceans and Seas and on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States briefed the Commission on progress in reaching agreement on the draft text that the Commission, acting as a preparatory body for the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States,[5] is required to submit to the special session.

25. Recognizing that small island developing States are the custodians of large areas of the world's oceans and significant biodiversity resources, participants reaffirmed the Barbados Programme of Action as the blueprint for the sustainable development of small island developing States. Attention was drawn to the progress made by small island developing States since the adoption of the Barbados

Programme of Action by the Barbados Global Conference in implementing sustainable development strategies through action at the national and the regional level.

26. Attention was drawn to the vulnerability of small island developing States in relation to their ability to withstand external economic shocks, for example, as a result of fluctuating commodity prices and susceptibility to natural disasters. Participants placed particular emphasis on the early development of a vulnerability index to supplement existing gross domestic product (GDP)-based criteria in the assessment of eligibility of small island developing States for concessional finance.

27. Concern was expressed at constraints still faced by small island developing States in fully implementing sustainable development strategies because of insufficient resources, due particularly to declining levels of official development assistance (ODA). Concern was further expressed that the decline in financial resources might reflect a lessening of commitment made at the Barbados Global Conference. It was recognized that the special session of the General Assembly would provide an opportunity for all countries to reaffirm commitments that had been made at the time the Barbados Programme of Action was adopted.

28. In this regard, the recent small island developing States donor meeting was acknowledged as a positive step. Participants emphasized the need for improved donor coordination and the importance of partnerships at all levels, including with the private sector, in order to further assist small island developing States in their efforts to achieve sustainable development.

29. There were expressions of concern at adverse effects on small island developing States of globalization and trade liberalization. It was emphasized that the special circumstances of small island developing States should be taken into account in the next phase of negotiations under the World Trade Organization.

30. Participants expressed concern at the risks to small island developing States of trans-shipment of hazardous wastes and materials through their jurisdictions. In this regard, there was a proposal to have the Caribbean Sea recognized as a special area in the context of sustainable development, bearing in mind the subregion's high degree of vulnerability as a result of the large number of ships with hazardous cargo traversing the Caribbean.

E. Changing consumption and production patterns

31. Participants emphasized that all countries were consumers and producers of a global and common set of resources. It was recognized that the industrialized countries should take the lead in changing consumption and production patterns, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, since consumption and production in developing countries were often driven by the patterns in developed countries.

32. It was noted that during the twentieth century, world consumption had undergone tremendous expansion, with substantial positive effects on human welfare for a large number of people. However, there were huge disparities in consumption between industrialized and developing countries and widening gaps between the wealthy and the poor almost everywhere. Furthermore, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, especially in developed countries, had done great environmental as well as social harm worldwide, with severe impacts often being experienced in the poorest regions of the world.

33. Participants noted that unsustainable consumption and production patterns included both overconsumption of natural resources, particularly in the developed countries, and poverty and underconsumption of basic goods and services in developing countries. There was an urgent need to find effective ways to address poverty, particularly in the poorest countries, and to thereby enable them to attain better life conditions and to achieve sustainable development.

34. It was noted that the developing countries and countries with economies in transition needed investment in skills formation and capacity-building, technology development and transfer, and promotion of greater efficiency in production, in order to enable them to address the priority goal of poverty eradication. Transfer of skills and technology, together with financial resources, was required to ensure access to international markets. Particular attention should be given to the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises. Participants stressed the need for developed countries, in particular, to meet their commitments to those ends, as outlined in Agenda 21, in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

35. It was noted that sustainable development required equitable access to resources and a decoupling of consumption and production from environmental degradation.

36. Participants emphasized that Governments, industry, media, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and individuals all had important roles to play in changing consumption and production patterns.

37. It was noted that it was in the interest of all countries to promote cleaner production and eco-efficiency in various economic sectors. For this purpose, a mix of instruments should be used, ranging from regulatory through economic to social instruments, including voluntary initiatives. A key challenge was to find ways to meet present and future demands, especially for non-renewable resources, food and energy.

38. It was noted that a better understanding about the driving forces that influenced consumer choice and behaviour was needed, including gender-related issues, and the role of the advertising sector and the media. It was noted that the further development of indicators of consumption and production could make an important contribution to this effort.

39. It was noted there was need for further study of the impacts of urbanization and urban planning on sustainable consumption and production, particularly in such areas as transportation, energy, water, sanitation and waste management.

40. Participants stressed the critical importance of education, information and public awareness, recognizing that broad participation in changing consumption and production patterns depended on public understanding of the impact of consumption and production patterns on health, quality of life, poverty and the environment. They encouraged UNEP and other international organizations, together with Governments, industry, media and other stakeholders, to contribute to education, information and public awareness.

41. Participants noted that globalization was of particular concern and that relationships between trade, environment and development should be examined with a view to promoting more sustainable patterns of consumption and production. It was emphasized that policies on trade and sustainable consumption should be mutually supportive. It was emphasized that policies to promote sustainable consumption and production should not be used for protectionism or in a discriminatory way, nor should they create obstacles to development in developing countries.

42. It was noted that financing for development must come primarily from domestic resources, but that ODA is also very important, especially for the least developed countries. In this context, donor countries were encouraged to make further efforts to proceed towards the fulfilment of the ODA target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP).

43. Participants welcomed the initiative by UNEP to elaborate an International Declaration on Cleaner Production and encouraged the signing of that Declaration.

44. Participants welcomed the elaboration of, and called for the adoption of, the new elements on sustainable consumption for inclusion in the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection.[6]

F. Focus points

45. The following sections of the report identify points that ministers and heads of delegation stressed for consideration by officials in finalizing Commission outcomes.

1. Tourism

Under this topic:

- A focused work programme identifying clearly what actions are required, by whom and, wherever possible, by when. This would include work that major groups have agreed to undertake, as well as actions for Governments and international organizations and agencies;
- The need to reflect the key role of industry and local authorities in achieving sustainable development in the tourism sector (including through such measures as Agenda 21 for travel and tourism, Local Agenda 21 and other initiatives, desirably with multi-stakeholder participation, and also monitoring, verification and assessment arrangements);
- The need for specific measures for capacity-building (for example, education and training arrangements for tourists, children, workers, educators, women, indigenous people and other relevant groups), including industry-led initiatives;
- The importance of identifying tourism planning and management activities (including the development of integrated planning arrangements, with mechanisms for including stakeholders; development and promotion of "best practices"; development of inter-agency study on carrying capacity; early efforts to minimize packaging waste associated with travel and tourism; and arrangements to ensure that international organizations and agencies take tourism into account in work programmes on relevant issues);

- Addressing of coastal issues effectively (including through fully integrated planning processes for coastal development; proactive support for small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-enterprises; IMO study on effectiveness of marine pollution regulations and compliance in the context of tourism impacts, especially in small island developing States;
- Inclusion of relevant direction for research activities;
- Inclusion of direction for stronger action on the exploitation of women and children, especially through sex tourism, recognizing the particular responsibilities of the home countries of sex tourists and the special role for the tourism industry in efforts to stamp out the problem. Governments to be urged to support ILO work in this area, including through ratifying and enforcing relevant agreements.

2. Oceans and seas

Under this topic:

- The importance for much of the world of ensuring a sustainable supply of food from oceans and seas as well as the need to protect marine biological diversity;
- Early ratification and entry into force of existing agreements;
- Implementing those agreements and other instruments such as agreed plans of action, including developing the necessary capacity at the national, regional and global level;
- The potential of Partnership conferences at the regional level involving all relevant stakeholders for mobilizing the activities and resources needed for the implementation of agreements and action plans, in particular the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities;
- The significance of regional fishing organizations as the cornerstone for achieving the sustainable use of fisheries, the need for them to be strengthened and given greater enforcement capacity and the need to encourage the creation of new regional fishing organizations in respect of non-regulated fisheries;
- The need for effective action on the problems of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, including by vessels flying flags of convenience and for the closest possible cooperation between FAO and IMO in resolving these problems;
- The problems of by-catch (both of non-target species and of other forms of wildlife), discards and destructive fishing practices; and the need for effective further work by global and regional fisheries organizations to address these issues;
- The problems associated with persistent organic pollutants and the need for an international agreement in this area; the importance of efforts to reduce the discharge of hazardous substances and avoiding contamination of the marine environment as a result of the scrapping of ships;
- The contribution that a global representative system of marine protected areas could make to the sustainable management of oceans and seas; and the need for sound principles in the development of the marine protected areas concept;
- The importance of improving scientific understanding of the marine environment in general and of ensuring that the best scientific information is available to regional and subregional decision makers; noting of the urgency of the review of GESAMP being undertaken by IMO; and emphasis on the significant impact on oceans of climatic phenomena such as the El Niño effect and encouragement of further work towards the understanding of these phenomena;
- The need for means by which each session of the Commission on Sustainable Development can review the implementation of its previous recommendations, including country and inter-agency feedback on progress;
- The importance of ensuring cross-sectoral integration at the national level to ensure that international agencies in the oceans area do not receive conflicting or inconsistent directions from their member States;
- The importance of international coordination and cooperation and the need to identify present gaps and areas where coordination and cooperation should be enhanced; in that context, the need to broaden and deepen the General Assembly's consideration of oceans and the law of the sea to more effectively encompass the full range of oceans issues, including those in Agenda 21; and, in addition, the need for improvements in the process of inter-agency collaboration utilizing existing mechanisms.

3. Small island developing States

Under this topic:

- The importance of the decision text emphasizing the continuing validity of the Barbados Programme of Action as a blueprint for the sustainable development of small island developing States;
- The particular vulnerability of small island developing States in relation to both economic shocks and natural disasters;
- Concern over declining ODA levels;
- The importance of the special circumstances of small island developing States being taken into account in the next phase of negotiations under the World Trade Organization;
- The importance of improving donor coordination and strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders in efforts to implement the Barbados Programme of Action;
- The opportunity provided by the special session of the General Assembly for all countries to reaffirm the commitments made at the Barbados Global Conference.

4. Changing consumption and production patterns

Under this topic:

- Focus future work through the development of strategies to achieve:

  (a) Integrated resource management, cleaner production and eco-efficiency;

  (b) Better understanding of globalization and its impact on consumption and production patterns;

  (c) Progress in addressing problems relating to urbanization, and impacts of human settlements;

- Promotion of investment in capacity-building, technology development and transfer, and promotion of greater efficiency in production, recognizing the roles of Governments, international organizations, industry and other stakeholders in this regard;
- Increase and improvement of international cooperation in the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries, with the requisite financial support.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] See United Nations Environment Programme, *Convention on Biological Diversity* (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[3] A/51/116, annex II.

[4] *Official Records of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea*, vol. XVII (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.84.V.3), document A/CONF.62/122.

[5] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April–6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[6] General Assembly resolution 39/248 of 9 April 1985, annex.